

OPI Official E-mail

Date: September 16, 2004

To: District Superintendents
County Superintendents

From: Rick Chiotti, Administrator
Health Enhancement and Safety Division
Office of Public Instruction

Re: Student Surveys

Recently many Montana schools have received materials promoting student and teacher surveys. The promotional materials from commercial vendors imply that federal law requires the schools to conduct student and teacher surveys. Please be aware that this is not true.

Federal law, specifically, the No Child Left Behind Act, requires only that if a school conducts a student survey then the school must comply with other federal laws that place restrictions on how such surveys can be conducted. These other federal laws are the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA). In its Title IV-A Safe and Drug-Free School provisions, the No Child Left Behind Act does include a requirement that schools that receive SDFS funding must comply with the “principles of effectiveness” and it is true that these principles include the need to conduct an assessment of the drug and violence problem in the school and community. However, the assessment does not need to be a student survey. The assessment can be performed in a variety of other ways, such as disciplinary reports or other records kept by the school.

Remember, no school is required to conduct a student survey under either federal or state law. Should a school wish to conduct a student survey as a part of its assessment of the alcohol and violence problems in the school and community, Montana schools can take advantage of two complementary and free surveys – the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) sponsored through the Office of Public Instruction every odd-numbered year, and the Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) sponsored by the state health department every even-numbered year. In fact, the registration packet for the February 2005 YRBS is being sent to schools October 1, 2004. Both the YRBS and the PNA are conducted as voluntary and anonymous surveys in full compliance with applicable federal laws.

If schools have questions about student surveys, please call Office of Public Instruction staff Susan Court (444-3178), Cathy Kendall (444-0829) or Rick Chiotti (444-1963).